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STAT

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CHATLOTTE, N.C.

A free-lance contributor to a magazine which has been criticized for helping recruit mercenaries said Thursday war has been given a bad reputation -- "it's actually a lot of fun."

Approximately 1,000 people, most clad in camouflage fatigues, are attending a week-long convention in Charlotte sponsored by the Boulder, Colo.-based "Soldier of Fortune" magazine.

For a \$100 registration fee, conventioners could attend military seminars, a parachute jumping school, gun demonstrations and competitions and a banquet. Other events would include demonstrations of the use of attack dogs, machine guns and knives.

The magazine has been criticized for helping recruit mercenaries but members of the staff contend it is not directly linked to any mercenary activities. They say its readership is comprised mostly of veterans, as well as law enforcement officers and active military personnel.

Dongvan said the Colorado-based publication engages in "participatory journalism" when it covers "hot spots" all over the world. "It does print the truth -- at least from the point of view we saw it directly -- not from a journalist drinking gin and tonic in his room and getting press handouts."

The publication bills itself as a "politically conservative, action-adventure magazine" but critics, including author Ken Lawrence, charge it aids in recruitment of mercenary soldiers.

Opponents contend the magazine is tied to right-wing hate groups and military intelligence groups, both in the United States and abroad. One group that organized a protest to the meeting said the magazine is "making an industry of terrorism."

Lawrence said he has researched the magazine and alleged it is not prosecuted for legal infractions because of ties to the Central Intelligence Agency and the U.S. military.

Retired Army Gen. William Westmoreland was scheduled to speak at a banquet Saturday and convicted Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy was expected to attend.

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*EXCERPTED*